**Abbreviated Service- due to storm**

**CHRISTMAS EVE SERVICE- DECEMBER 24, 2022**

**ZION-PHILIPSBURG**

**ANNOUNCEMENTS**

Welcome to worship on this Christmas Eve, December 24, 2022. How wonderful it is to finally gather in person for this most Holy service.

Let us continue with the Christmas Dialogue and greeting found in your bulletin.

**CHRISTMAS DIALOG AND GREETING**

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light.

**The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.**

Those who dwelt in the land of deep darkness, on them light has shined.

**We have beheld Christ’s glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father.**

For to us a child is born, to us a Son is given.

**In him was life, and the life was the light of all people.**

May the grace and truth of Christ be with you.

**And also with you.**

**OPENING PRAYER**

Let us pray. Almighty God, you made this holy night shine with the brightness of the true Light. Grant that here on earth we may walk in the light of Jesus’ presence and in the last day wake to the brightness of his glory; through your only Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

**FIRST READING: ISAIAH 9:2-7**

2The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light;  
 those who lived in a land of deep darkness— on them light has shined.  
 3You have multiplied the nation, you have increased its joy;  
 they rejoice before you as with joy at the harvest, as people exult when dividing plunder.  
 4For the yoke of their burden, and the bar across their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor, you have broken as on the day of Midian.  
 5For all the boots of the tramping warriors and all the garments rolled in blood shall be burned as fuel for the fire.  
 6For a child has been born for us, a son given to us, authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.  
 7His authority shall grow continually, and there shall be endless peace  
 for the throne of David and his kingdom. He will establish and uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time onward and forevermore.  
 The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.

**READING**- **Luke 2:1-20**

1In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. 2This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. 3All went to their own towns to be registered. 4Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. 5He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. 6While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. 7And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

8In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. 9Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. 10But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: 11to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. 12This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.” 13And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying,  
 14“Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!”  
15When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us.” 16So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. 17When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; 18and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. 19But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. 20The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.]

**SERMON**

Grace and peace to you in the name of the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit.

I invite you to close your eyes for a moment. Imagine you are a visitor to the town of Bethlehem. There is a chill in the air. The streets are full of others who have come to participate in the census. It is night, and folks are telling you to get off the streets. Violence has been occurring between the Roman soldiers and the travellers who have come into town. You find a home willing to offer you a place to stay for the night, there is no bed, but it is at least safe and out of the cold. You notice a couple close by; you had seen them earlier in the week. She was pregnant and looked like she would give birth soon. You make your way over to the couple and notice that she is holding a baby. Wow, she was closer to giving birth than you thought.

You have some cheese and bread with you, so you take it over and offer it to the couple. You introduce yourself, and they tell you that their names are Joseph and Mary. As you share in the small meal together, they tell you that they, too, have come to take part in the census. Although Mary is young, she seems calm and peaceful. She asks if you would like to hold the newborn child and does not give you time to say no.

She places him gently in your arms. The babe is sleeping; you can see his tiny chest rising and falling in rhythmic breaths. You cannot help but feel an overwhelming sense of peace at that moment. The busyness and chaos of the outside world are a distant memory.

The babe begins to stir and slowly opens his eyes. He begins to coo gently. His eyes are brown in colour, and they follow your every move. The babe is so alert you can feel a sense of love and trust when you look into them. It is something that you have never felt before. There is something different about this newborn child; you cannot quite put your finger on it.

After a while, you give the babe back to Mary. You wish them well and head back to your small area to sleep. You look out the window and see a bright star lighting up the night; it is like it is guiding people to this exact spot. You also see a shadow of a cross far off in the distance. You make your way to the small corner you find home for the night, wrap yourself up in a blanket and fall asleep quickly with a feeling of joy in your heart and a newfound sense of love and understanding.

You wake early in the morning and are preparing to leave; you want to get in line for the census taking as early as possible. As you make your way to the door, you see Mary feeding her son; you smile and wish them well. She smiles back and says, "may God bless you."

As you go out into the street, which are again bustling and busy, you feel a sense of electricity in the air. Folks are talking about this couple who came into Bethlehem last night and gave birth to a baby boy. There is talk that he is Christ the Lord, God in the flesh. You remember Mary and Joseph and the sense of joy and peace that filled your heart when you held their newborn son. You could not quite put your finger on why you felt that way. Could this be the reason? Could that little babe, born in the chill of the night in a simple room with an ox and donkey nearby, be God in the flesh? A chill runs down your spine; you turn around to go back, but there are too many people, and the line is just too long. You sigh, take your place in the line, and meet many folks who have walked for days to get here. They have had nothing to eat. You open your bag and find some extra bread and cheese; you are not quite sure how it got there. You unwrap it and begin to share it with all around you, and the feelings of joy and peace return to your heart. You begin to tell your story of meeting Mary, Joseph and the tiny babe, and you share the news of what you have heard from others in the street. This surely was not a coincidence. Suddenly you hear yelling; you turn and see a commotion between the soldiers and those in line. Chaos erupts. You are being pushed, causing you to lose your balance and fall into the person beside you. You begin to pray……

God broke into our world as a defenceless and tiny baby born in the still and peace of the night, within the violence of the political times. Within the chaos, that tiny babe was born to bring hope and light into a broken and weary world. When things are in turmoil, God is there. When things do not go as planned, and we are not able to worship together for the third year in a row, God is there. When illness or injury takes control, God is there.

On this holiest of all nights, God enters into our world, seeking us out wherever we are, reminding us of God's steadfast and unconditional love in the miracle of that night so long, long ago. I pray that you stay healthy and safe, I wish you peace and joy. I wish each of you a Merry Christmas and a Blessed 2023. Amen.

**THE PRAYERS**

Glory to God in the highest,

**and peace to God’s people on earth.**

Blessed are you, Prince of Peace. You rule the earth with truth and justice.

**Send your gift of peace to all nations of the world.**

Blessed are you, Wonderful Counselor. You enlighten the heart with steadfast love.

**Enliven your church that it might bear good tidings of great joy to all people.**

Blessed are you, Emmanuel. You promise to be with us even to the end of the age.

**Open our eyes to see your presence in all who are hungry, lonely, or homeless.**

Blessed are you, Son of Mary. You share our humanity.

**Have mercy on the sick, the dying, and all who suffer this day.**

Blessed are you, Son of God. You dwell among us as the Word made flesh.

**Reveal yourself to us in word and sacrament that we may bear your light to all the world.**

**LORD’S PRAYER (ELW p. 191)**

Gathered into one by the Holy Spirit, let us pray as Jesus taught us.

**Our Father, who art in heaven,**

**hallowed be thy name,**

**thy kingdom come,**

**thy will be done,**

**on earth as it is in heaven.**

**Give us this day our daily bread;**

**and forgive us our trespasses,**

**as we forgive those**

**who trespass against us;**

**and lead us not into temptation,**

**but deliver us from evil.**

**For thine is the kingdom,**

**and the power, and the glory,**

**forever and ever. Amen.**

**THE GOSPEL OF THE INCARNATION**- **John 1:1-14**

1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was in the beginning with God. 3 All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being 4 in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. 5 The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overtake it.

6 There was a man sent from God whose name was John. 7 He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. 8 He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. 9 The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.

10 He was in the world, and the world came into being through him, yet the world did not know him. 11 He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. 12 But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, 13 who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.

14 And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father’s only son, full of grace and truth.

**HYMN OF LIGHT: SILENT NIGHT, HOLY NIGHT! (ELW 281)**

Silent night, holy night! All is calm, all is bright

Round yon virgin mother and child. Holy Infant, so tender and mild,

Sleep in heavenly peace, sleep in heavenly peace.

Silent night, holy night! Shepherds quake at the sight;

Glories stream from heaven afar, heav’nly hosts sing, Alleluia!

Christ, the Savior, is born! Christ, the Savior, is born!

Silent night, holy night! Son of God, love’s pure light

Radiant beams from your holy face, with the dawn of redeeming grace,

Jesus, Lord, at your birth, Jesus, Lord, at your birth.

**BLESSING**

May you be filled with the wonder of Mary, the obedience of Joseph, the joy of the angels, the eagerness of the shepherds, the determination of the magi, and the peace of the Christ Child. Almighty God, Father, ☩ Son, and Holy Spirit bless you now and forever. **Amen.**

**DISMISSAL**

Christ the Savior is born! Go in peace. Proclaim this good news.

**Thanks be to God.**

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